III. REGISTRATION OF VITAL EVENTS

The origin, flow, and disposition of North Carolina vital records are illustrated in the flow diagram on the following page. A brief history of vital records processing and current registration practice in North Carolina is presented.

The Bureau of Vital Statistics was created by an act of the General Assembly in 1913. The Vital Statistics office became a part of the Department of Human Resources in 1973. In 1989, the General Assembly combined the Department of Human Resources' Division of Health Services and the environmental and natural resources divisions of the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development to create the new Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources. In 1997 the public health divisions, including the Vital Statistics office, were combined back with the human resources division to form a new Department of Health and Human Services. The public health authority of this department and the laws that it administers are contained in Chapter 130A, Article 4, of the General Statutes of North Carolina. Within the organizational structure of the Department of Health and Human Services, the State Registrar of Vital Statistics is appointed by the State Health Director. Duties of the State Registrar are accomplished primarily by the Vital Records Section.

Birth and Death

The collection of birth and death records began on October 1, 1913. The Department of Health and Human Services is the custodian of these records. The hospital administrator or person attending a non-hospital delivery is required to file a birth certificate or fetal death report within 10 days after delivery. The funeral director or person burying or otherwise disposing of a body is responsible for filing a death certificate with the local registrar within five days after death.

The local registrar is the county health director. A clerk of the county health department, designated by the local registrar as deputy registrar, carries out registration procedures locally. The deputy registrar forwards the original birth and death certificates to the Department of Health and Human Services on the fifth day of the month following the birth or death, where they are processed and permanently preserved. Microfilmed copies and computerized data from birth and death certificates are sent to the National Center for Health Statistics.

North Carolina was admitted into the National Death Registration Area in 1916 and into the National Birth Registration Area in 1917.

Fetal Death

North Carolina law requires the filing of a fetal death report for fetal deaths (stillbirths) of 20 or more weeks gestation. Legislation enacted by the 1971 General Assembly and subsequent legislation requires that therapeutic abortions be reported separately, effective May 19, 1971. Thus, the induced abortion report form now replaces a fetal death report for the very few therapeutic abortions occurring at 20 or more weeks gestation. For this reason, counts of fetal deaths and perinatal deaths since 1971 are not strictly comparable to counts in previous years.

Marriage and Divorce

In 1957, the General Assembly enacted legislation requiring that the duties of the clerk of court include the registration of divorces and annulments of marriage effective January 1, 1958. Certificates of divorce and annulments are required to be sent to the Department of Health and Human Services on or before the 15th day of the month following the event. The filing of certificates of divorce rather than divorce listings was started January 1, 1984, following legislation in 1983.

By virtue of legislation enacted in 1961, the duties of the county register of deeds include the registration of marriages occurring on or after January 1, 1962. Copies of the certificates of marriage are required to be forwarded to the Department of Health and Human Services on or before the 15th day of the month following the marriage. The original certificates are filed with the county register of deeds.

In January 1964, North Carolina was admitted to the National Marriage Registration Area. North Carolina is not a member of the National Divorce Registration Area.

THE ORIGIN, FLOW, AND DISPOSITION OF VITAL RECORDS NORTH CAROLINA

HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR

Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-101 & 114

Completes birth certificate or fetal death report for hospital deliveries. Obtains certifier's signature.

Sends birth certificate or fetal death report to county registrar.

Responds to requests for information.

PHYSICIAN

Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-101 & 114

Signs birth certificate or fetal death report.

Completes birth certificate or fetal death report for non-hospital delivery; sends to county registrar.

Completes cause of death and signs certificate for all non-medical-examiner deaths.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-112 & 115

Sends notification of death to registrar and completes death certificate.

Obtains cause of death and signature of physician.

Obtains burial transit permit when necessary.

Delivers death certificate to county registrar within five days.

MEDICAL EXAMINER

Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-114, 115 & 383

Initiates certificate for a death resulting from injury, suicide, or homicide, and for certain unattended deaths and fetal deaths.

Investigates circumstances surrounding aforementioned deaths and certifies cause and manner of death.

REGISTER OF DEEDS

Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-110

Completes marriage certificates for all marriages.

Sends copy of marriage certificate to Department of Health and Human Services.

Prepares delayed certificates and sends to DHHS for approval.

Initiates amendment applications.

CLERK OF COURT

Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-111

Completes divorce certificate and forwards to Department of Health and Human Services.

COUNTY REGISTRAR (COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT)

Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-97

Checks records for accuracy and completeness.

Requests further information when necessary.

Prepares copy of birth and death certificates for register of deeds.

Sends original birth and death certificates to the Department of Health and Human Services.

Issues burial transit permits.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (DHHS)

VITAL RECORDS SECTION

REPORT PROCESSING

- —Receives and processes current reports of births, deaths, marriages, and divorces and delayed birth certificates.
- —Codes demographic data.
- Provides consultation and assistance to individuals involved with vital records registration.

CORRECTIONS

—Receives and processes all requests for change to prior records.

SPECIAL REGISTRATION

—Reviews and processes all requests for adoption, legitimation, and judicial determinations of paternity.

NOSOLOGY

- —Codes all conditions at death using current revision of the ICD.
- —Codes underlying cause on fetal death report.
- —Codes congenital anomalies on birth certificates.

MICROFILM AND PRESERVATION

- -Microfilms all vital records.
- Prepares certifications, verifications, and manuscripts from microfilm and xerox.
- —Stores and preserves all original records.

STATE CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS

- —Answers requests for vital statistics data.
- —Publishes annual reports; conducts special studies.
- —Keys data from vital records—births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, and divorces.
- —Performs selective edit of variables and maintains cumulative files.
- —Transmits data to the National Center for Health Statistics.

SOCIAL SERVICES Sends adoption reports to special registration.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS

Receives microfilm and data from state.

Performs sample quality control and assures receipt of all records and corrections.

Publishes United States reports.

Provides technical assistance.

Provides classes in registration (ASTI).

OTHER STATES

Exchange birth and death records